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Irascible Casey revives CIA, stands up well to criticism

WASHINGTON

There he is, William Joseph Casey, head of the world's most expensive intelligence agency, a man who mutters out of the side of his mouth like W.C. Fields, is often called an Irish street pug and yet is grudgingly credited with having restored a sick CIA to health.

Casey, nearly 72, is irascible, impatient and so intent on his own goals, that he couldn't care less what Congress or the press think of him. In fact, he shows rich disdain for both of those powerful Washington institutions. Casey might reason that he didn't have to heed them when he was a crack intelligence agent in World War II, so why should he now?

When Barry Goldwater was chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Casey rankled him so that Goldwater says, "There were days when I would like to have kicked his butt. Still, Casey has done an outstanding job. Everywhere I go in the world, intelligence people are very laudatory of him. He has put the team together. Today, we have people standing in line, wanting to go to work for the CIA."

Political problems

Casey admits he has problems with Congress but claims they are rooted in the administration's Central American policy, and "are largely political." His explanations of the CIA's mining of Nicaraguan waters was so laced with memory lapses and obfuscations that exasperated senators sputtered that Casey had lost all credibility. Democrat Pat Moynihan, N.Y., huffily threatened to quit the committee. Casey wasn't bothered.

One consequence is that the Senate now seems ready to join the House in stopping the administration's program of aiding anti-government rebels (contras) in Nicaragua.

As for the press, Casey decided early on that it was a waste of time for CIA analysts to brief reporters, and besides, the media had no business at the

CIA anyway. "We don't have the resources for that," Casey says. "Hell, even the trade magazines were trying to get in."

Thwarted by Casey, reporters pursue the CIA story anyway, and many are surprised to get good reports.

Budget increases

Casey has wangled whopping increases in the CIA budget, now estimated at \$2 billion. "National Estimates [regional world studies]," prepared from mountains of reports and research, had fallen to 12 a year in the '70s. Regarded by intelligence professionals as "our reason for being," the number has climbed to about 60 a year under Casey.

While Casey argues that there were more covert operations in the Carter years than now, a follow-up

question gets him to admit that "ours are far bigger and more intense." In a word, CIA agents are once again all over the world, in force, trying to plumb the intent of certain nations, and not satisfied, as Casey's predecessor, Adm. Stansfield Turner was, to chiefly rely on electronic monitoring.

Once, the CIA not only had trouble getting recruits, it was hooted and picketed off campuses. Today, the CIA is swamped with applications and is hiring about 1,500 people a year. Its staff is now an estimated 18,000. "We have good people," Casey says, "but we need more. On pay, we can't compete with industry for the best graduates. But we're getting there. Midwesterners are good. There is still some anti-CIA feeling in the East, particularly in the Ivy League."

More importantly, the CIA can rightfully claim to be at least equal to the Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti — the KGB. The Soviets have more agents and they work in "open" societies like the

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